

ART REVIEW: WORKS DEAL IN ELEMENT OF SMALLNESS

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ART REVIEW

Works Deal in Element of Smallness

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Three local artists' works on view at Cal-Tech share more than their makers' geographic proximity. Ben Sakoguchi presents a 50-foot-wide painting. Max Finkelstein shows familiar sculpture of aluminum polygons arranged on black wall supports. Walter Askin's paintings bring "Through the Looking Glass" whimsy to Southland suburbia.

Different as they are, all are concerned with smallness. Each tends to build his art through a sum of elements. This very basic communality dictates certain virtues in the art and precludes others. Such work usually has a certain modesty and intimacy, a good environment for the expression of feelings that are obviously personal and maybe lovable and humorous.

Symphony of Flutes

Such work may warm us with humane modesty but may not be impressive and is likely to seem fussy, overworked and lacking self-confidence. When an artist gifted for intimacy tries to work too large, he is liable to seem overblown or just silly, like a whole symphony orchestra made up of flutes.

Ben Sakoguchi developed his reputation as a realistic draftsman and printmaker working small

scale. When I heard he'd done a mural-size painting it sounded like trouble.

The big work is untitled, but might be called "Sakoguchi's Inferno." It explores sex and violence in images of popular illustrative art. The top four feet of the painting contains literally hundreds of renderings of World War II military aircraft—diving, crashing, bombing, dog-fighting and spewing red-hot lead.

Masked Children

The lower half is crowded with tough chickies often accompanied by symbols of their virility, snakes, guns and horses. They tend to wear bathing gear or pants, boots and other fetishy trappings.

A few large images are used for organization but most figures are but a few inches tall. Obsession with planes and girls is relieved by a section of war-ruined European cities and one of masked children playing war games.

The painting invites comparison to James Rosenquist's much publi-

cized "F-111." Since the Rosenquist is better known, was painted in New York, has resided at the Met and is in a fashionable private collection, one might assume it is a better painting.

It is, on account of its large-scale imagery, more impressive but that is not the same thing as better.

I actually don't know which is the better painting or if that determination is possible. I know that I find the Sakoguchi a hell of a lot more interesting.

It is not troubled by its additive miniaturist scale which in fact contributes considerably. "F-111" comes on like an imper-

sonal statement, coolly sociological.

Sakoguchi's Boschian nightmare is sufficiently detached to act partly as a record of actual events but its obsessive repetitions tell us that it is also the specter of the artist's personal Armageddon. We learn that there is nothing insignificant about the popular iconography that has absorbed the mythology of the past and the Jungian unconscious.

Finkelstein shows works previously reviewed in these columns. Most are medium-small wall reliefs or free-standing objects made of brushed aluminum polygons. Slick, cool and correct in design, they

are haunted by a certain timidity. Unfamiliar works included a "Flag Series" touched with humor and two objects compounded of metal tubing.

Walter Askin presents a half-dozen each of paintings and lithographs plus one drawing with collage. Paintings are one-color solids to the bottom edge where an architectural setting is painted somewhat theatrically. The artist brings a spooked whimsy to his academic style. Tract-house rooms are suddenly invaded by The Red Queen in a bikini, palms sprout from the floor and rocks float like clouds.



AT THE PARTY—Actor Brian Aherne talks to Count and Countess Ghislain de Vogue at an informal cocktail reception held in honor of the French couple.
Times photo by Mary Frampton